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AUTHOR Detweiler, John S.; Hammond, Frankie A.
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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the effects of instruction in an introduction to public relations class on student perceptions of contrasting public relations communication styles. Two standard models, the traditional scales of family communication patterns and J. E. Grunig's triangular model of public relations objectives, were adapted for the study. A content analysis of several general public relations textbooks was undertaken to help shape six pertinent hypotheses to be tested, using a questionnaire given to students in two introductory public relations classes at a state university. There was a total of 309 students who completed the questionnaire during the first week of class and 186 who completed the same questionnaire during the last week of class. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to explore any differences between the perceived communication patterns of chief executive officers, public relations practitioners serving as advisers to chief executive officers, public relations practitioners dealing directly with diverse publics, and newspaper editors. The second part of the questionnaire dealt with different goals given priority by public relations practitioners. Results indicated that at the end of the semester students viewed chief executives as having more open communication patterns than the students had originally perceived and that they recognized that public relations advisers, rather than serving as unrestrained ombudsmen, must deal with greater communication patterns restraints than the students perceived at the beginning of the semester. (Four figures and 6 tables of data are included; 19 references and the survey instruments are attached.) (RS)

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ANALYZING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TWO MEASURES OF DIVERSITY IN A PUBLIC RELATIONS CLASS

By

Professor John S. Detweiler

and

Associate Professor Frankie A. Hammond

Department of Public Relations
College of Journalism and Communications
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida 32611

CS507348

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ANALYZING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TWO MEASURES OF DIVERSITY IN A PUBLIC RELATIONS CLASS

By John S. Detweiler & Frankie A. Hammond

"Diversity by the Year 2000" in public relations typically refers to the demographic characteristics of professionals or audiences, but the theme can also be applied to patterns of communication. Some communication styles are aimed at inducing conformity with the viewpoints and values of a power structure. Other communication styles seek to empower all participants in a relationship. Analyzing the effects of instruction in an Introduction to Public Relations class on student perceptions of these contrasting communication styles is one of the goals of this research.

Another goal is to analyze student perceptions on the degree of diversity they see in the priority structure of public relations practitioners. Are public relations practitioners motivated by one predominant focus, such as organizational goals or meeting public expectations, or are their efforts directed at a multiplicity of such goals?

It is highly likely that students come to an introductory course in public relations with certain perceptions of how the field operates and of the priorities of its practitioners. Are these perceptions reinforced or changed as a result of the instruction the students receive in the course? If change occurs, do the new perceptions reflect a growing understanding of the needs of a diverse society?

The history of public relations provides conflicting standards of practice. On one hand, public relations practitioners are seen as members of the organization's dominant coalition who help its top management devise a top-down, "one clear voice" strategy? On the other, they are seen as advocates for democratic decision-making and respect for a diversity of viewpoints within the organization.

Public relations professionals frequently advocate a diverse set of seemingly conflicting priorities for the practice of public relations. Some practitioners give priority to the goals of the organization they serve. Some consider the expectations of outside publics as paramount in their activities. Others advocate a balance between the two. Still others contend that strong professional norms should take precedence over either organizational goals or public expectations. Do differences in perceived professional goals dictate different perceptions of communication style? One of the goals of this research is answer this question.

The study adapts two standard models, one of communication behavior and one of public relations functioning, to test such questions. The first model is the traditional scales of Family Communication Patterns. The scales have two dimensions appropriately suited to the study of the importance of diversity in public relations. One dimension deals with the handling of controversy and the other deals with autonomy from power figures. The second model is a triangle reflecting the professional-public interest-organizational dimensions of public relations functioning.

The methods employed by the study included a modest content analysis of several general public relations textbooks to help shape

pertinent hypotheses to be tested. Once the hypotheses were developed, they were tested by using items reflecting the two models in a questionnaire distributed to students in two introductory public relations classes at a state university. Students were asked to record their perceptions on the items twice, once on the first day of class before any instruction had commenced and once on the last day of class when the only other agenda for the course was review for the final exam.

The questionnaire had two parts. The first was designed to explore any differences between the perceived communication patterns of chief executive officers, public relations practitioners serving as advisers to chief executive officers, public relations practitioners dealing directly with diverse publics, and of newspaper editors. The second part dealt with different goals given priority by public relations practitioners--professional goals, public expectations, organizational goals, a 50-50% combination of professional goals and public expectations, a 50-50% combination of professional goals and organizational goals, a 50-50% combination of organizational goals and public expectations, or a equally mixed 33%-33%-33% combination of professional goals, public expectations and organizational goals.

Two Models Adapted for the Study

Family Communication Patterns

Most of this study deals with an adaption of a two-dimensional model of family communication patterns, developed by McLeod and Chaffee (1972). The model poses two types of relations in family situations. The patterns were found consistently in a half dozen

studies in a variety of social settings. One is called **socio-oriented** and the other is called **concept-oriented**. Rather than postulating a single authoritarian-permissive power continuum, the theory postulates that parents may emphasize either (or neither, or both) kinds of structural relations in raising their children.

In families that stress the socio-oriented relation, "the child is encouraged to maintain harmonious personal relationships with his parents and others. He may be advised to give in on arguments, avoid controversy, repress anger, and generally keep away from trouble." On the other hand, in the concept-oriented communications environment, "the child is stimulated to express his ideas and to challenge others' beliefs. He is frequently exposed to both sides of an issue, and takes part in controversial discussions with adults" (Chaffee et al., 1973).

In coorientation terms, McLeod and Chaffee found families which restricted communication would seem to emphasize congruency and agreement while showing less concern for accuracy. In other words, the perceived agreement in those families could quite likely prove to be a false consensus. The reverse would be true for families which permitted free exchange of ideas. Accuracy would become a dominant goal of the interaction (McLeod and Chaffee, 1972).

McLeod and Chaffee see communication structure playing a major role in a persons's construction of social reality. The socio-oriented person asks: Who is involved? Do I like them? Do they like me? The concept-oriented person asks: What is involved? Is it a good idea? How does it compare to what I know?

Ritchie (1988) used descriptions of family communication patterns that are readily adaptable to the language of public

relations. He suggested that socio-oriented communication patterns were directed more at conformity than harmony, implying a "closed communication environment and one-way flow of communication." On the other hand, concept-oriented communication implied an "open communications environment with a two-way information flow." Ritchie shared tentative results, based upon college students reflecting upon their own family communications patterns and their perceptions of family harmony, in which "concept-orientation, rather than socio-orientation, is more conducive to a climate of harmony in the family." Ritchie (1988, p. 28) found the scale measuring the degree to which the respondents perceived the communication relationship within their families as marked by harmony and mutual tact to be strongly and positively related to concept-orientation (r=.57) and negatively related to socio-orientation (r=-.36).

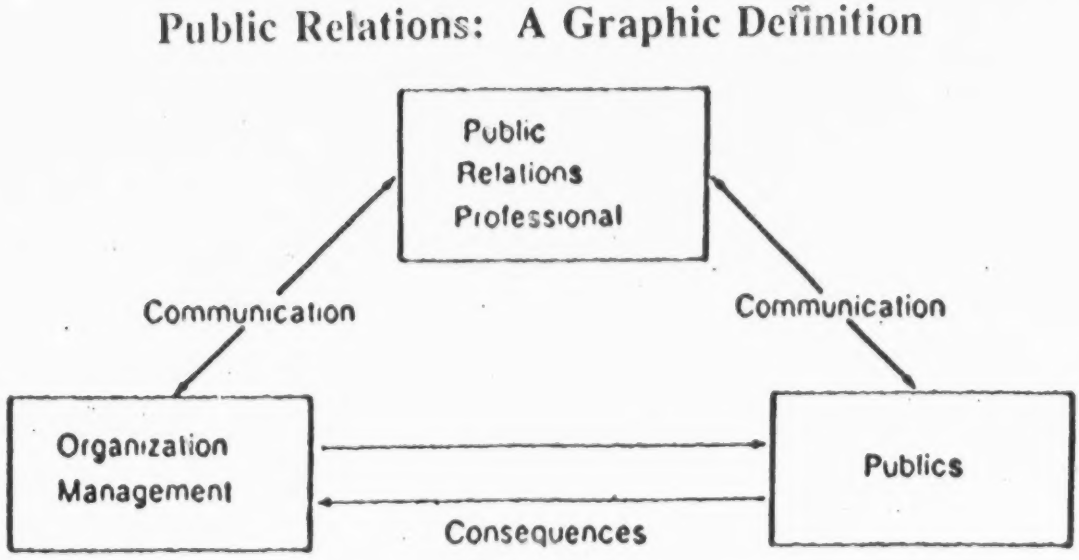
Ritchie made an observation that would place public relations practitioners as strong advocates of concept-orientation in family communications:

> If parents find that it is necessary to conform to the expectations of authority figures (or to the ideas prevailing among their social peers) they will encourage an attitude of conformity in their children. Conversely, if parents experience working conditions requiring sophisticated communication skills, the ability to think independently and engage in the free exchange of ideas, they will encourage an attitude of independence and intellectual autonomy in their children. In both cases, the implicit objective is to prepare the child to adapt successfully to the anticipated conditions of her or his future life (pp. 14-15).

Graphic Definition of Public Relations

Grunig (1984, p. 10) graphically designed the "Model of the Public Relations Function in an Organization." The model is a triangle which defines public relations in terms of relationships.

FIGURE 1: GRUNIG'S TRIANGLE



The public relations professional communicates both with management and with the public. In communication with management, the professional learns of management decisions which must be conveyed to the public and also seeks to convey public opinion to management. In communication with the public, the professional seeks to explain management decisions to the public and also to discern public opinion which should be channeled back to management. The "public" of any organization is determined by consequences. If a group's actions can affect an organization, then that group is a public of the organization. Likewise, if an organization's acts impact upon a group, that group is a public of the organization.

While the Grunig model posits an individual public relations practitioner at the top of triangle, the concept is extended somewhat in this study to suggest the "collective" professional--professional norms. This extension suggests that public relations practitioners may shape communications decisions based upon the salience of such factors as professional norms, public expectations or organizational goals--or some combination of the three.

The Development of Hypotheses

In an effort to draw a distinction between various communications patterns affecting public relations practitioners, the study sought student perceptions of the communications patterns of four different roles in corporate communications--chief executive officers, public relations practitioners in the role of advising chief executive officers, public relations practitioners in the role of communicating to outside publics, and newspaper editors (serving as one form of outside public who would particularly be predisposed to open communications patterns.)

Therefore, hypotheses were developed to test differences in each of these roles.

Hypothesis 1

While, by definition, public relations practitioners would seem to favor the two-way concept-orientation in communication patterns, there continues to be references to one-way communication behavior on the part of some practitioners.

Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 22) estimate that 65 percent of present organizations practiced one-way communication and another 20 percent practiced "two-way asymmetric" public relations in which "the

organization does not change as a result of public relations; it attempts to change public attitudes and behavior" (p. 23). That would leave only 15 percent practicing two-way symmetric communication, a close parallel to concept-orientation in the family communication patterns literature.

Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985, p. 474) contend that the public relations function has had its most extensive development in business and industry. A few paragraphs later the authors add that in evaluating corporate public relations' effectiveness: "The yardstick is progress toward the goals and timetables set by management" (p. 475). Then the authors add, with emphasis:

> In times of stress, management increases its concern for the survival of the business and demands greater commitment to organizational goals. Internal dissent or criticism of communications policies or actions tends to be regarded as an act of disloyalty (p. 475).

Newsom, Scott and Turk (1989) speak of the work of Stephen A. Greyser, Harvard Business School professor. Greyser's "manipulative model" of consumer relations, with the goal of controlling the public. In discussing perceptions of public relations, the authors add:

> There is considerable evidence that corporate executives go to the public relations staffs they already employ only for advice on communications problems, not for insights into the public perceptions that might cause those problems (p. 23).

These descriptions of public relations practitioners committed to management directives suggest Hypothesis 1. It tests the degree to which perceptions of students enrolled in a public relations class see chief executive officers as practicing a "parents know best" type of communication behavior.

Hypothesis 1: Chief executive officers, because of their perceived hierarchial role, will be seen more in agreement with socio-

oriented communication patterns and less in agreement with concept-oriented patterns than will either newspaper editors or public relations practitioners in the two roles described in this study.

Hypothesis 2

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics places journalists squarely on the side of open communication:

> WE BELIEVE the agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their Constitutional mandate and freedom to learn and report the facts.
>
> WE BELIEVE in public enlightenment as the forerunner of justice, and in our Constitutional role to seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth.
>
> WE BELIEVE those responsibilities carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy and fairness (Seitel, 1989, p. 118).

On the other hand, journalists see public relations practitioners as people who profit from one-sided communications. A public relations text uses an excerpt from the Associated Press Managing Editor's manual, APME Guidelines, to illustrate this view:

> A flack is a person who makes all or part of his income by obtaining space in newspapers without cost to himself or his clients. Usually a professional...they are known formally as public relations men. The flack is the modern equivalent of the cavalier highwayman of old...A flack is a flack. His job is to say kind things about his client. He will not lie very often, but much of the time he tells less than the whole story. You do not owe the P.R. man anything. The owner of the newspaper, not the flack, pays your salary. Your job is to serve the readers, not the man who would raid your columns" (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985, p. 430).

Hypothesis 2 tests whether or not students enter or depart from Introduction to Public Relations with this journalist-oriented concept of communication patterns.

Hypothesis 2: Newspaper editors, because of their perceived desire to promote diversity and reveal conflicts, will be seen more in agreement with the concept-oriented communication patterns and less in agreement with socio-oriented communication patterns than will either

chief executive officers or public relations practitioners in the two roles described in this study.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis deals with the role of the public relations practitioner advising top management. Actually, there are two conflicting models for this role, so two contrasting hypotheses were selected for testing.

One model sees the public practitioner as a member of management's dominant coalition. While the public relations practitioner may interpret public expectations to top management, it is top management's role to set organizational policy and the public relations executive's role to interpret that policy to key publics.

> The public relations department can counsel management. It can advise management. It can even exhort management to action. But management must call the shot on organizational policy. Practitioners must fully understand the whys and wherefores of policy and communicate the ideas accurately and candidly to the public. Anything less can lead to major problems (Seitel, 1989, p. 12).

Hypothesis 3A: Public relations practitioners who advise chief executives will be perceived by students as a member of the dominant coalition of their organizations. Therefore, such advisers will be seen as following communication patterns similar to those of chief executives.

The second model sees public relations practitioners playing the difficult role of confronting top management with the checks and balances on its autonomy expected by key publics. According to this point of view, the function of public relations is to primarily respond to publics. This conforms to the "service model" of consumer relations developed by Harvard Business School's Greyser. (Newsom, Scott and Turk, 1989, p. 18).

Grunig and Hunt (1984) described this approach as follows:

> Public, or social, responsibility has become a major reason for an organization to have a public relations function. The modern public relations person frequently serves as an ombudsman for the public inside the corporation (p. 48).

Hypothesis 3B: Public relations practitioners who advise chief executives will be perceived by students as performing an ombudsman role reflecting outside views to top management. Therefore, such advisers will be will be seen as following more open communication patterns than chief executives.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 reflects a third point of view on the role of public relations--similar to Greyser's transactional model of consumer relations. In this model, the goal of public relations is to achieve mutually beneficial relationships among all the publics that an institution has (Newsom, Scott and Turk, 1989, p. 18). The open style of communication should be present with the management public and with other publics as well. Grunig's triangular model suggests that organizations and publics are linked through consequences which necessitate two-way communication by the Public Relations Department directed at both organizational management and outside publics (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p. 10). The public relations practitioner in this model should be consistent across all functions. The public relations practitioner advising top management should not be advocating a communication pattern any different from that of the public relations practitioner communicating to outside publics.

Hypothesis 4: Public relations practitioners who communicate with outside publics and public relations practitioners who advise top managers will be perceived as practicing similar communication patterns.

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 recognizes the underlying conflict of interest between journalism and public relations over what interests and informs the audience. Two illustrations of this conflict found in public relations text are as follows:

> The media definition of "news" is at the heart of this problem. To illustrate: An archbishop criticizes, with reason, the two major wire services when they base their nationally circulated story on seven lines of a twenty-page document that was issues after prolonged deliberation by America's Roman Catholic bishops. American news media tend to emphasize stories of social disorder, both at home and abroad (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1985, p. 429.)

> ...People often complain that the media are more interested in bad news than in anything positive. To a degree, this complaint is valid. Although no two reporters or editors can agree on what constitutes news, more often than not, news is the sensational, the unusual, or the unexpected. And oftentimes for an organization, this equals bad news (Seitel, 1989, p 326.)

Hypothesis 5: Because controversy rather than autonomy is the sensitive issue between editors and public relations practitioners, the difference between these groups will be seen as more significant on the scale's controversy items than on the autonomy items.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis deals with the professional credibility of public relations. Does top management look upon public relations practitioners as organizational employees or independent professionals?

> Surveys show that line people are generally oriented to the advancement of the company and that their future is heavily dependent upon being loyal to the organization. Staff people, on the other hand, tend to be oriented toward the advancement of their profession, whether it be engineering, scientific research, advertising, marketing or public relations. Staff people identify highly with an occupation rather than with an organization (Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1989, p. 73).

> Whereas marketing and advertising groups must, by definition, be advocates for their specific products, the public relations department has no such mandated allegiance. Public relations, rightfully, should be the corporate conscience. An organization's public relations professionals should enjoy enough autonomy to tell it to management "like it is," as sportswriter Howard Cosell might put it. If an idea doesn't make sense, if a product is flawed, if the general institutional wisdom is wrong, it is the duty of the public relations professional to challenge the consensus (Seitel, 1989, pp. 49-50).

Hypothesis 6: Because autonomy rather than controversy is the sensitive issue between chief executives and public relations practitioners, the perceived differences between these groups will be seen as more significant on the scale's autonomy items than on the controversy items.

METHODS EMPLOYED IN THE STUDY

One of the goals of the study was to apply content in four introductory public relations texts to the priorities and communications patterns of four occupational roles--chief executive officer, public relations practitioner functioning as an adviser to the chief executive officer, public relations practitioner interacting with key publics of an organization, and editor (representing a key public which traditionally is considered to give emphasis to autonomy of individuals in society and to controversy as a means of expressing diversity among such individuals).

Two well-known models were modified for this purpose. One was Grunig's "Model of the Public Relations Function in an Organization" and the other was Family Communication Patterns model developed by McLeod and Chaffee. The specific items in Family Communication Patterns were taken from scales employed by Ritchie (1988). These items are listed in Appendix A.

In addition to editing the two scales of the Family Communication Patterns model to apply to organizational communication rather than family communication, the socio-oriented and concept-oriented scales were subdivided at one point to create two specific orientations. Six items dealing with controversy were extracted from the two scales to make up a single controversy scale. The other eight items in the two scales were combined to make up a single scale dealing with autonomy from authority figures..

The six controversy-related items included three items from the socio-orientation subscale and three items from the concept-orientation subscale:

1. How often did your parents say there are some things that just shouldn't be talked about? (S-O)
2. How often did your parents say the best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it? (S-O)
3. How often did your parents say that you should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others. (S-O)
4. How often did your parents talk at home about things like politics or religion, where one family member takes a different side from others? (C-O)
5. How much did your parents emphasize that getting your ideas across is important, even if others don't like it. (C-O)
6. How often did your parents say that you should always look at both sides of an issue? (C-O)

The eight autonomy-related items selected included four taken from the socio-oriented scale and four from the concept-oriented scale:

1. How often did your parents answer your arguments by saying something like "You'll know better when you grow up"? (S-O)
2. How often did your parents say that their ideas are correct and you shouldn't question them? (S-O)
3. How often did your parents say that you shouldn't argue with adults? (S-O)
4. How often did your parents argue that there are some things that are either right or wrong? (S-O)
5. How much did your parents emphasize that every member of the family should have some say in family discussions? (C-O)
6. How often did your parents ask your opinion when the family was discussing something? (C-O)
7. How often did your parents admit that children know more about some things than adults do? (C-O)
8. How often did your parents encourage you to challenge their ideas and beliefs? (C-O)

Each of these items was modified somewhat so that they could reasonably apply to chief executive officers and their publics, newspaper editors and their readers, public relations practitioners counseling their chief executives, and public relations practitioners interacting with outside publics.

A questionnaire (Appendix B) was developed in which 14 items in the Family Communication Pattern scales were placed in a randomly determined order. There were four pages of the questionnaire dealing with these scales, one each for chief executive officers, public

relations counselors acting as advisers to top management, public relations practitioners acting as communicators to outside publics, and newspaper editors.

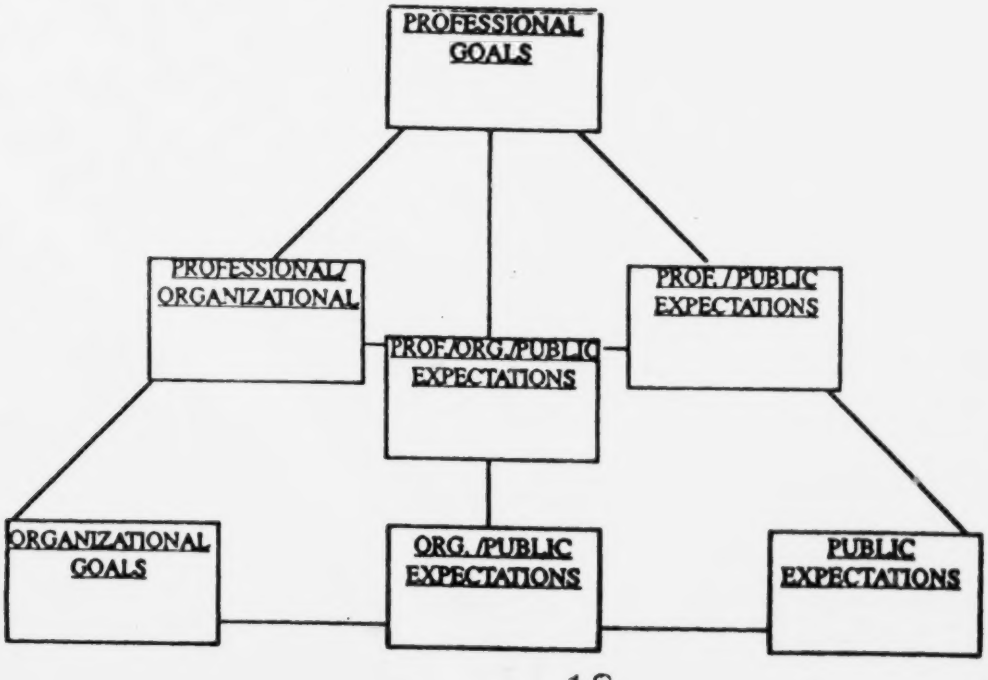
A fifth page of the questionnaire dealt with goal of public relations practitioners, illustrated by Figure 2. Text for the three points of the triangle are as follows:

(P) PROFESSIONAL GOALS--Designing high-quality programs which result in professional honor, awards and recognition for outstanding achievement.

(O) ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS--Helping the organization communicate to win support for its strategies and objectives among key publics.

(PE) PUBLIC EXPECTATION GOALS--Designing programs which take into account the viewpoints, interests and expectations of the organization's key publics.

FIGURE 2: TRIANGLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS GOALS



The questionnaire was administered twice to students in two Introduction to Public Relations sections at a state university in Fall 1989. The two courses had the same instructor and had identical texts, lectures and assignments for the term. Approximately 425 students were enrolled in the two sections. The questionnaire was administered on the first day of class, prior to any instruction in the course, and on the last day of class after course instruction was completed except for a short review period and a final exam. Completion of the questionnaire was strictly voluntary on the part of the students and had no bearing upon their grade in the class.

Course content was not influenced by the study. The course dealt with the nature of public relations, its role in society, the dynamics of the public relations process, the tools and techniques utilized, and the professional practitioners who manage the function. These topics were supplemented by guest speakers from differing types of organizations and videotapes of case studies. The text used was written by a public relations professional rather than an educator, Fraser Seitel's The Practice of Public Relations. The instructor of the class was a white, middle-class, middle-aged female who assesses her own family communication patterns as concept-oriented.

The first-day-of-class responses were not tabulated until the course was completed. The data from the questionnaire included paired responses (by social security number) of students who had filled out the questionnaire on both the first and last day of class, responses

from students who completed the questionnaire only on the first day of class, and responses from students who completed the questionnaire only on the last day of class. There seemed to be no consistent pattern of change in the paired before-after tests, so the responses from each of the questionnaire periods are reported only on an aggregate basis.

The responses of the students were subjected to statistical analysis using paired t-tests. The t-tests were utilized to determine if there were any statistical differences between item means among the students' perceptions of the four roles. Then items were combined for separate runs of t-tests on the seven socio-oriented scale items, seven content-oriented scale items, six conflict items on the two scales, and eight autonomy items on the two scales.

To test the first four hypotheses the combined mean scores of the students' perceptions for all socio-oriented and concept-oriented items were compared with one another for chief executive officers, for public relations practitioners seen in an advisement role to top management, for public relations practitioners seen interacting with outside publics, and for newspaper editors. For the last two hypotheses, paired t-tests were used to compare the students' responses on combined means for the items differentiated by their relationship to controversy or autonomy.

RESULTS

There were 309 students who completed the questionnaire during the first week of class and 186 who completed the identical questionnaire during the last week. There were few significant changes in the students' perceptions of either communications patterns or the goals of public relations as a result of the class. The attitudes on these two measures showed little change as a result of a term of instruction.

A review of the five hypotheses showed few surprises.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1: Chief executive officers, because of their perceived hierarchial role, will be seen more in agreement with socio-oriented communication patterns and less in agreement with concept-oriented patterns than will either newspaper editors or public relations practitioners in the two roles described in this study.

This hypothesis was strongly supported in both the pre- and post-class assessments. The differences between CEOs and the other roles were actually moderated somewhat during the semester, but not to the extent that they went above the .001 level of significance.

TABLE 1: T-TEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER MEANS AND OTHER GROUP MEANS

Scale: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Moderately agree, 3=Neutral
4=Moderately Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Sample	CEOs	PR Adviser	PR Outreach	Editor
Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means				
Before	2.75	3.55***	3.20***	3.16***
After	2.95	3.41***	3.33***	3.30***
Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means				
Before	2.61	1.87***	2.17***	2.23***
After	2.44	1.95***	2.07***	2.09***

***T-test difference from CEO means at the .001 significance level

On three of the seven socio-oriented communication pattern items, the students' perceptions of chief executive officers were moderated during the term of instruction.

Chief executives communicate to their publics that it is not wise to argue with authority figures. (Before: 2.65, After: 2.99, $p < .001$)

Chief executives communicate to their publics that there are some things that just shouldn't be talked about. (Before: 2.78; After: 3.06, $p < .01$)

Chief executives communicate to their publics that the best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it. (Before: 2.64; After: 2.90, $p < .05$)

On three of the seven concept-oriented communication patterns, the student's perceptions of chief executive officers were changed to reflect less authoritarian stances during the term of instruction.

Chief executives communicate to their publics that members of such publics may know more about some things than the executives do. (Before: 2.93, After: 2.53, $p < .01$)

Chief executives communicate to their publics that they want all members of such publics to have a say in issues which are important to the executive. (Before: 2.86, After: 2.54, $p < .01$)

Chief executives communicate to their publics that members of such publics should challenge the executives' ideas and beliefs. (Before: 3.14, After: 2.89, $p < .05$)

The most pervasive change brought about in the students' perceptions of communications patterns during the Introduction of Public Relations course was that chief executive officers had a greater stake in acknowledging their publics' interests and opinions than the students had originally estimated.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2: Newspaper editors, because of their perceived desire to promote diversity and reveal conflicts, will be seen more in agreement with the concept-oriented communication patterns and less in agreement with socio-oriented communication patterns than will either chief executive officers or public relations practitioners in the two roles described in this study.

TABLE 2: T-TEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEWSPAPER EDITOR MEANS AND OTHER GROUP MEANS

Scale: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Moderately agree, 3=Neutral
4=Moderately Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Sample	CEOs	PR Adviser	PR Outreach	Editor
Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means				
Before	2.75***	3.55***	3.20	3.16
After	2.95***	3.41	3.33	3.30
Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means				
Before	2.61***	1.87***	2.17	2.23
After	2.44***	1.95**	2.07	2.09

T-test difference from Editor means at the .001 (***) or .01 (**) significance level

Hypothesis 2 is not supported by the data. The newspaper editors were perceived to be significantly less supportive of socio-oriented communication patterns only when compared to chief executive officers. The same was true for concept-oriented communication patterns; it was only when compared which chief executive officers that editors were perceived to be significantly more supportive of such open patterns of communication.

In fact, the public relations practitioner in the adviser role to chief executives was perceived by students to be more supportive of open communication than editors. This finding will be discussed more extensively in discussion of Hypothesis 3.

Comparison of student perceptions during the first and last week of class showed that there were few changes in the perceptions newspaper editor communication patterns during the term.

One socio-oriented perception regarding editors was strengthened during the term and one was moderated. Students increased the strength of their views that editors would disagree with an item which communicated to their publics that it is not wise to argue with authority figures. On the other hand, they moderated the degree of agreement they saw editors giving to an item that said publics would understand complex issues more as they gain experience or rise in authority.

> **Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that people will understand complex issues more as they gain experience and rise in authority.** (Before: 2.29, After: 2.63, $p < .001$)

> **Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that it is not wise to argue with authority figures.** (Before: 3.34, After: 3.59, $p < .05$)

One concept-oriented perception regarding editors was significantly changed during the term. The students strengthened their belief that editors would be in support the view of superior community knowledge on some issues.

> **Newspaper editors communicate to their readers than members that members of their community may know more things than the editors do.** (Before: 2.57, After: 2.31, $p < .05$)

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3A: Public relations practitioners who advise chief executives will be perceived by students as a member of the dominant coalition of their organizations. Therefore, such advisers will be seen as following communication patterns similar to those of chief executives.

Hypothesis 3B: Public relations practitioners who advise chief executives will be perceived by students as performing an ombudsman role reflecting outside views to top management. Therefore, such advisers will be will be seen as following more open communication patterns than chief executives.

TABLE 3: T-TEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PUBLIC RELATIONS ADVISER MEANS AND OTHER GROUP MEANS

Scale: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Moderately agree, 3=Neutral 4=Moderately Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Sample	CEOs	PR Adviser	PR Outreach	Editor
Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means				
Before	2.75***	3.55	3.20***	3.16***
After	2.95***	3.41	3.33	3.30
Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means				
Before	2.61***	1.87	2.17***	2.23***
After	2.44***	1.95	2.07*	2.09**

T-test difference from Public Relations Adviser means at the .001 (***), .01 (**) or .05 (*) significance level

Hypothesis 3A was clearly not supported by the data. Public relations practitioners, particularly when they are advising top management, seemed to be perceived as more supportive of open communication patterns than newspaper editors. They were significantly different from the communication patterns attributed to chief executives beyond the .001 level of significance.

Hypothesis 3B proved to be an enigma. It was significantly supported in the perceptions of students during the first week of the Introduction to Public Relations class, but was not as clearly supported in their minds after they had attended the class. The idea that public relations practitioners go out of their way to reflect

conflicting views to top management was strong, but during the term it was somewhat mitigated by information and experiences which the students encountered while taking the class. To some extent the change may be due to the extremity of the original views.

Two socio-oriented items reflecting perceptions of public relations practitioners in their adviser role were moderated significantly during the term.

> **PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that the executives' ideas are correct and that members of such publics should not question them.** (Before: 4.11, After: 3.82, $p < .01$)
>
> **PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that members of such publics should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others.** (Before: 4.25, After: 4.06, $p < .05$)

Scores on one concept-oriented item seemed to change during the term, again moderating extreme original views of open communication patterns on the part of the public relations adviser.

> **PR professionals advice CEOs to communicate to their publics that they want all members of such publics to have a say in issues which are important to the executive.** (Before: 1.97, After: 2.20, $p < .05$)
>
> **PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that the executives' ideas are correct and that members of such publics should not question them.** (Before: 4.11, After: 3.82, $p < .01$)
>
> **PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that members of such publics should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others.** (Before: 4.25, After: 4.06, $p < .05$)

Hypothesis 4

Public relations practitioners who communicate with outside publics and public relations practitioners who advise top managers will be perceived as practicing similar communications patterns.

This hypothesis was more closely supported by perceptions held by students at the end of the term than at the beginning of the term. However, what was not anticipated was how closely perceptions of public relations practitioners communicating to outside audiences would be to those of newspaper editors. The results show that public relations practitioners practice generally open communications patterns with members of the community as do editors. Such patterns are not as extreme as the open communication patterns advocated by public relations advisers, who may be acting to compensate for less open communication patterns attributed to chief executive officers.

TABLE 4: T-TEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PUBLIC RELATIONS OUTREACH MEANS AND OTHER GROUP MEANS

Scale: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Moderately agree, 3=Neutral 4=Moderately Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Sample	CEOs	PR Adviser	PR Outreach	Editor
	Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means			
Before	2.75***	3.55***	3.20	3.16
After	2.95***	3.41	3.33	3.30
	Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means			
Before	2.61***	1.87***	2.17	2.23
After	2.44***	1.95*	2.07	2.09

T-test difference from Public Relations Communicator means at the .001 (***) or .05 (*) significance level

Student perceptions on two items on the socio-oriented communications pattern scale were reinforced during the term. Both items moved to a stronger position of disagreement.

> **PR professionals communicate to outside publics that it is not wise to argue with authority figures.** (Before: 3.47, After: 3:73, $p < .05$)
>
> **PR professionals communicate to outside publics that there are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.** (Before: 3.41, After, 3.63, $p < .05$)

Student perceptions on one item on the concept-oriented scale were reinforced to reflect a somewhat stronger positive commitment to openness.

> **PR professionals communicate to outside publics that members of such publics may know more about some things than the professionals' chief executives do.** (Before: 3.41, After: 3.68, $p < .05$)

Hypothesis 5

Because controversy rather than autonomy is the sensitive issue between editors and public relations practitioners, the differences between these groups will be more significant on the controversy items than on the autonomy issues.

Hypothesis 5 is supported by the data (See Table 5, p. 28). Differences between the means on six controversy items were particularly sharp among students at the beginning of the term. These differences were moderated somewhat, but a significant difference between the combined means was still apparent on the three concept-oriented scale items. For the three socio-oriented scale items, a similar difference between the means was maintained but the smaller number of subjects (188 to 304) produced a probability of significance at the .08 level. On the other hand, the differences between the means on the eight items was virtually nonexistent.

TABLE 5: CONTROVERSY OVER AUTONOMY: T-TEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PUBLIC RELATIONS OUTREACH MEANS AND EDITOR MEANS

Scale: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Moderately agree, 3=Neutral
4=Moderately Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Sample	PR Outreach	Editor
Conflict Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	3.39	3.31*
After	3.52	3.42
Conflict Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	1.96	2.11***
After	1.91	2.06**
Autonomy Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	3.06	3.05
After	3.18	3.18
Autonomy Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	2.34	2.32
After	2.13	2.20

T-test difference at the .001 (***), .01 (**) or .05 (*) significance level

Hypothesis 6

Because autonomy rather than controversy is the sensitive issue between chief executives and public relations practitioners, the differences between these groups will be more significant on the autonomy items than on the controversy items.

TABLE 6: AUTONOMY OVER CONTROVERSY: T-TEST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHIEF EXECUTIVE MEANS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ADVISER MEANS

Scale: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Moderately agree, 3=Neutral
4=Moderately Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree

Sample	Chief Exec	PR Adviser
Conflict Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	2.94	3.90***
After	3.17	3.77***
Conflict Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	2.35	1.71***
After	2.32	1.80***
Autonomy Socio-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	2.60	3.29***
After	2.78	3.15***
Autonomy Concept-oriented Communication Pattern Means		
Before	2.82	2.00***
After	2.52	2.07***

T-test difference at the .001 (***) significance level

Hypothesis 6 is not supported by the data. While there were highly significance differences between public relations advisers and chief executives on the eight autonomy items, there were equally significant differences in the means of these two groups on the six items pertaining to controversy. The differences between these two groups on each of these subdivisions of the communications pattern scales serves only to reinforce Hypothesis 2--that public relations advisers are perceived to go out of their way to promote open

communication patterns when dealing with chief executives who are thought to follow more authoritarian patterns.

Professional Goals

In addition to analyzing student impressions of the communications patterns of public relations professionals, this study sought to examine student impressions of public relations priorities. The questionnaire contained a triangle in which each point represented a different public relations priority--professional goals dominate, organizational goals dominate or public expectations dominate. The students could select a mid-point between any two of these three priorities, or they could select a point in the center of the triangle in which each of the three priorities were valued equally.

FIGURE 3: PRIORITIES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS AS SELECTED BY STUDENTS USING GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

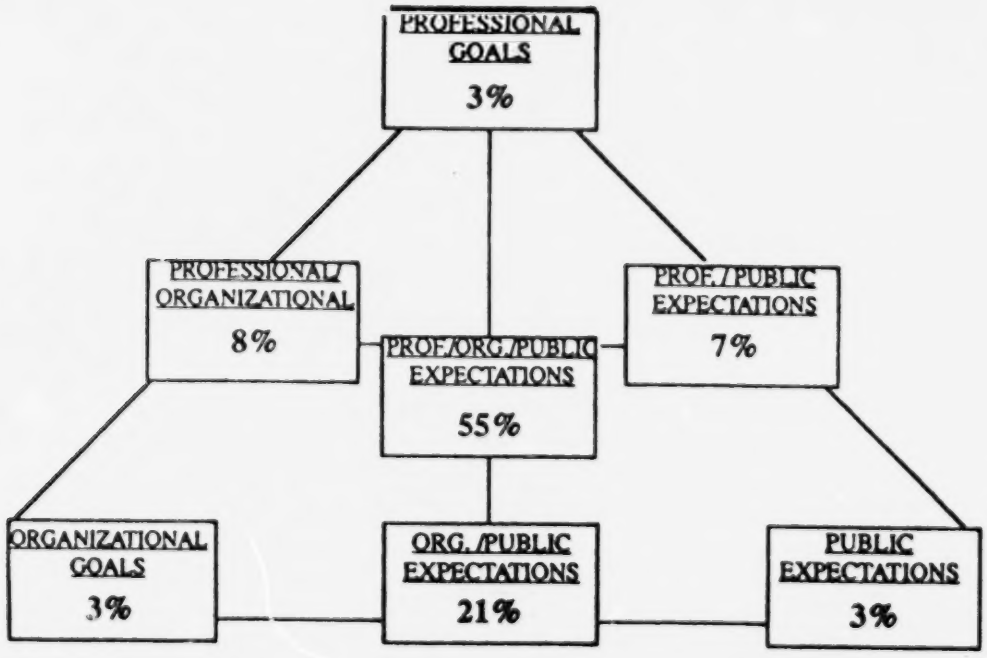


Figure 3 shows that the students were drawn to the midpoint All Goals Equal response, reflecting a balanced 33%-33%-33% emphasis between Professional Goals, Organizational Goals, and Public Expectations. In fact, only 9 percent of the respondents on the first day of class and 10 percent of the respondents on the last day of class chose one of the items at three points of the triangle. When this finding was presented to a research seminar after the data were collected, a colleague, Dr. Mary Ann Ferguson, suggested that the triangular figure may be a good way to represent data but that it may be a poor way to collect such data.

Therefore, students in a subsequent class were asked on the first day to react to the following three items:

TYPICAL PRACTITIONER

Your opinion of the goals which drive the TYPICAL public relations practitioner.

Professional Goals/Organizational Goals (Choose One)

Professional Goals More Important_____	Equal in Importance_____	Organizational Goals More Important_____

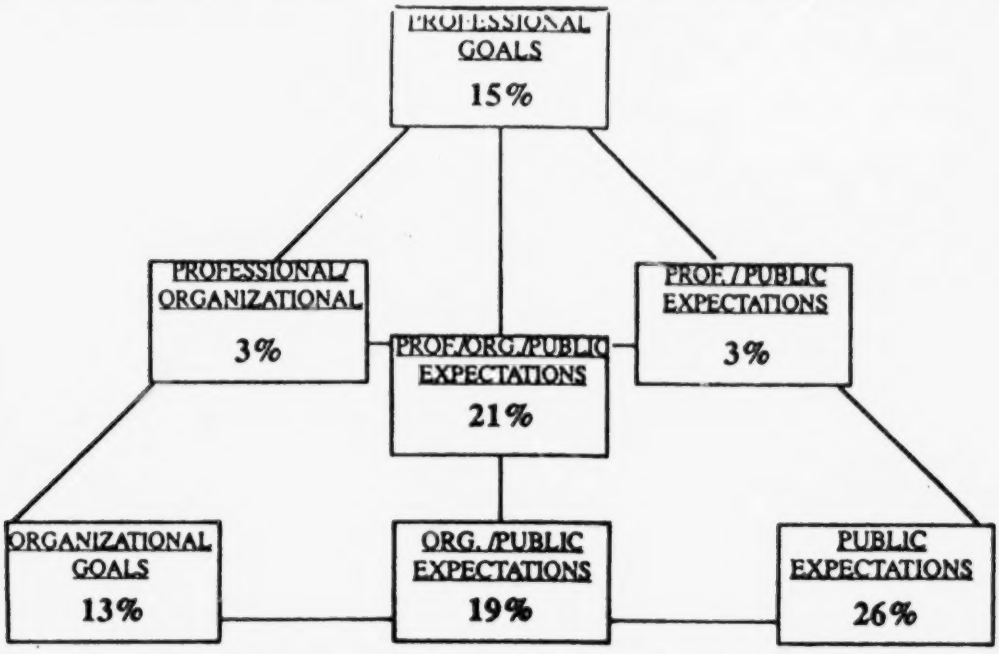
Organizational Goals/Public Expectations (Choose One)

Organizational Goals More Important_____	Equal in Importance_____	Public Expectations More Important_____

Public Expectations/Professional Goals (Choose One)

Public Expectations More Important_____	Equal in Importance_____	Professional Goals More Important_____

FIGURE 4: PRIORITIES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS AS SELECTED BY STUDENTS USING THREE-ITEM QUESTIONNAIRE



In the original experiment the students' estimate of priorities did not change significantly as a result of instruction in the Introduction to Public Relations class. On both the first and last week of class the majority of the students expressed a belief that public relations priorities gave equal weight to professional goals, organizational goals and public expectations. The only other category in which there was substantial support was a priority giving equal regard to organizational goals and public expectations.

As seen in Figure 4, a nongraphic method of collecting priority data dramatically changed the results in a first day of class setting. The class term had not ended at this reporting period. In the nongraphic collection process, the three points of the triangle

receive 58 percent of the responses. (This includes assigning a response to the preferred goal of one comparison when the other two were thought to be equal.)

Difference priority assessments collected through the graphic representation in the initial data of classes reported here did not materially affect the students' perceptions of communication patterns, including responses on the first day of class and last day of class.

CONCLUSIONS

"Diversity by the Year 2000" can have meaning in public relations beyond such demographics as sex, race, religion and national origin. While public relations practitioners should be committed to diversity in human characteristics and background, they should also be committed to diversity in human discourse.

This paper sought to approach the topic of diversity not so much from the standpoint of social outcome but rather from the standpoint of process outcome. It selected two measures--one involving communication patterns and one involving goals or priorities--to analyze student perceptions of the public relations practice.

Research by Broom, Dozier, Acharya, Ferguson and others on the roles of public relations practitioners (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1985, pp. 68-70) has been helpful in analyzing both curriculum and professional practice in public relations. One of the goals of this

study was to suggest two other measures, adaptations of the Family Communications Pattern scale and of Grunig's triangular model of public relations objectives, which might be equally useful in such analysis.

This study shows how each of these instruments can be applied to public relations education. The same instruments in different educational settings might produce dramatically different results. Such differences might prove helpful to educators in discussing the curricular outcomes desired from introductory public relations courses.

In this instance, at the end of the semester students viewed chief executives as having more open communication patterns than they had originally perceived and recognized that public relations advisers, rather than serving as unrestrained ombudsmen, must deal with greater communications patterns restraints than they perceived at the beginning of the semester. According to the instructor, these results are not surprising considering the text and the instructor's view on the function of public relations. Students in these sections became more closely oriented to the instructor's perception of "real world" experiences.

Other instructors using other texts, other experiences and other case problems might be expected to guide student perceptions in the opposite direction. The "real world" of public relations to those instructors might be derived from an entirely different fabric. The

instruments used in this study may help crystalize these different approaches to public relations education.

As with previous studies of roles in public relations, further studies to replicate and amplify such research would be highly useful to public relations educators. The next obvious step is to use the adapted Family Communication Patterns scales and an adaptation of the Grunig triangle in similar perception studies involving professionals. The authors have undertaken such a study, using the three-item questionnaire associated with Figure 4 to gather priority data rather than the triangular model itself.

At the present time these instruments are not specific objects of instruction. In this study, for instance, they were used to probe the student's incoming and outgoing stereotypes of the priorities and communication styles of public relations practitioners. With more research and fuller discourse, the two instruments might be used for determining success or failure in achieving desired concepts of "what should be" rather than simply recording "what is."

Under such conditions, a process orientation to "Diversity by the Year 2000" might gain improved insights. For one thing, the Family Communication Patterns scales link items based upon avoidance of conflict with items based upon enforcing conformity in discourse. While this study looked at the conflict and autonomy items separately, there is strong evidence that the Family Communication Patterns scales are correct in linking the two.

In issues management, are public relations practitioners seeking to control risks or are they developing organizational responses which will meet diverse initiatives from audiences? So-called risk-free environments are in all likelihood stifling environments. This research suggests that the questions of risk avoidance and open communication styles may not be compartmentalized in public relations as if they were separate entities.

Diversity will be at the heart of many controversial issues during the 1990s--affirmative action, free enterprise, environmental responsibility, and international challenges or commitments. Public relations practitioners may find themselves at odds with one another on one or more of these issues, but the concept of process diversity--particularly a commitment to free expression of opinions--should be a goal that would bind all public relations professionals together.

# # #

FOOTNOTES

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APPENDIX A
FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERN SCALE
(Ritchie AEJMC paper, 1988)

Socio-Orientation

1. "You'll know better when you grow up."
2. Your parents ideas are correct and you should not question them.
3. A child should not argue with adults.
4. There are some things in life that are either right or wrong.
5. There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.
6. The best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it.
7. You should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others.

Concept-Orientation

1. The family talks about topics like politics and religion where some persons take different sides from others.
2. Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions.
3. The parents ask the child's opinion when the family is discussing something.
4. Kids know more about some things than adults do.
5. Your parents encourage you to challenge their ideas and beliefs.
6. Getting your ideas across is important, even if others don't like it.
7. You should always look at both sides of an issue.

APPENDIX B
COMMUNICATIONS PATTERNS SURVEY
Introduction to Public Relations - July 1989

Age ____(D1) Sex ____(D2) Major_____(D3)

CHOOSE ONE:

(1) Financial Status
___Economically Dependent
___Economically Independent

(2) Family Perception (D5)
___There were few arguments or disagreements in my family
___My family was typical in arguments or dissagreements
___There were frequent arguments or disagreements in my family

(3) Self-Perception (D6)
___I'm conscious of what others think when I make decisions and don't like to stir up controversy
___Sometimes others shape my opinions and sometimes I choose to stand out from the crowd
___I consider myself an independent thinker and don't mind standing out in a crowd

NOTE: EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SHEETS WAS DISTRIBUTED TO RESPONDENTS IN A VARYING ORDER SO THAT ONE-FOURTH OF THE STUDENTS SAW EACH PAGE EITHER FIRST, SECOND, THIRD OR FOURTH IN SEQUENCE.

Clients or Chief Executives

Scale: (1) Strongly agree (2) Moderately agree (3) Neutral
(4) Moderately Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree

1. ____ Chief executives communicate to their publics that it is not wise to argue with authority figures.

2. ____ Chief executives communicate to their publics that getting their ideas across is important, even when others don't like it.

3. ____ Chief executives communicate to their publics that they feel comfortable with discussions on topics like politics or religion where some persons take different sides from others.

4. ____ Chief executives communicate to their publics that members of such publics will understand complex issues more as they gain experience and rise in authority.

5. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that the best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it.

6. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that members of such publics should challenge the executives' ideas and beliefs.

7. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that everyone who is affected by a problem should have some say in how it is resolved.

8. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that there are some things in life that are either right or wrong.

9. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that members of such publics should always look at both sides of an issue.

10. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that members of such publics should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others.

11. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that they want all members of such publics to have a say in issues which are important to the executive.

12. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that there are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.

13. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that the executives' ideas are correct and that members of such publics should not question them.

14. ___ Chief executives communicate to their publics that members of such publics may know more about some things than the executives do.

Public Relations Professionals

Scale: (1) Strongly agree (2) Moderately agree (3) Neutral
(4) Moderately Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree

1. ____ PR professionals advise chief executives (CEOs) to communicate to their publics that it is not wise to argue with authority figures.

2. ____ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that getting their ideas across is important, even when others don't like it.

3. ____ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that they feel comfortable with discussions on topics like politics or religion where some persons take different sides from others.

4. ____ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that members of such publics will understand complex issues more as they gain experience and rise in authority.

5. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that the best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it.

6. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that members of such publics should challenge the executives' ideas and beliefs.

7. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that everyone who is affected by a problem should have some say in how it is resolved.

8. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that there are some things in life that are either right or wrong.

9. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that members of such publics should always look at both sides of an issue.

10. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that members of such publics should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others.

11. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that they want all members of such publics to have a say in issues which are important to the executive.

12. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that there are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.

13. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that the executives' ideas are correct and that members of such publics should not question them.

14. ___ PR professionals advise CEOs to communicate to their publics that members of such publics may know more about some things than the executives do.

Public Relations Professionals

Scale: (1) Strongly agree (2) Moderately agree (3) Neutral
(4) Moderately Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree

1. ____ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that it is not wise to argue with authority figures.

2. ____ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that getting their ideas across is important, even when others don't like it.

3. ____ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that members of those publics should feel comfortable with discussions on topics like politics or religion where some persons take different sides from others.

4. ____ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that members of such publics will understand complex issues more as they gain experience and rise in authority.

5. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that the best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it.

6. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that members of such publics should challenge the professionals' chief executives' ideas and beliefs.

7. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that everyone who is affected by a problem should have some say in how it is resolved.

8. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that there are some things in life that are either right or wrong.

9. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that members of such publics should always look at both sides of an issue.

10. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that members of such publics should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others.

11. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that they want all members of such publics to have a say in issues which are important to the professionals' chief executive.

12. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that there are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.

13. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that the professionals' chief executives' ideas are correct and that members of such publics should not question them.

14. ___ PR professionals communicate to outside publics that members of such publics may know more about some things than the professionals' chief executives do.

Clients or Chief Executives

Scale: (1) Strongly agree (2) Moderately agree (3) Neutral
(4) Moderately Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree

1. ____ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that it is not wise to argue with authority figures.

2. ____ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that getting their ideas across is important, even when others don't like it.

3. ____ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that they feel comfortable with discussions on topics like politics or religion where some persons take different sides from others.

4. ____ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that people will understand complex issues more as they gain experience and rise in authority.

5. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that the best way to stay out of trouble is to keep away from it.

6. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that people should challenge the editors' ideas and beliefs.

7. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that everyone who is affected by a problem should have some say in how it is resolved.

8. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that there are some things in life that are either right or wrong.

9. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that people should always look at both sides of an issue.

10. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that people should give in on arguments rather than risk antagonizing others.

11. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that they want all members of the community to have a say in issues which are important to the editors.

12. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that there are some things that just shouldn't be talked about.

13. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that the editors' ideas are correct and that members of the community should not question them.

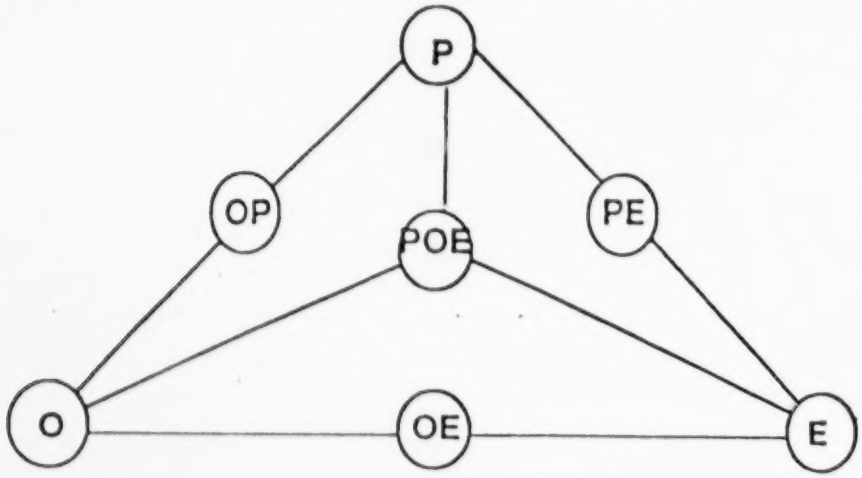
14. ___ Newspaper editors communicate to their readers that members of the community may know more about some things than the editors do.

GOALS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

(P) - PROFESSIONAL GOALS--Designing high-quality programs which result in professional honors, awards and recognition for outstanding achievement.

(O) - ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS--Helping the organization communicate to win support for its strategies and objectives among key publics.

(E) - PUBLIC EXPECTATION GOALS--Designing programs which take into account the viewpoints, interests and expectations of the organization's key publics.



CHOOSE ONE BY CIRCLING INITIALS:

p	Professional goals dominate
op	Near equal emphasis (50%-50%) on Organizational/Professional goals
o	Organizational goals dominate
pe	Near equal emphasis (50%-50%) on Professional/Expectation goals
poe	Near equal balance (33%-33%-33%) on Professional/Organizational/Expectation goals
e	Public Expectation goals dominate
oe	Near equal emphasis (50%-50%) on Organizational/Expectation goals